

Ideas from Breakout Group on Natural Resources and Open Space

Comprehensive Plan Workshop, May 12, 2011

Overarching goal:

Enable all residents to step out their door and walk anywhere in Bedford and beyond, no matter where in the town they live.

1. Use best practices to create and maintain trails and open space
 - a. Work with other towns such as Concord to connect Bedford trails to their trails.
 - b. Learn from other towns about how they maintain their trails.
 - c. Work with Burlington to improve recreational access to the “landlocked parcel” on Page Hill.
 - d. Collaborate with the Sudbury Valley Trustees to acquire and protect land in their cachement—that is, West Bedford
 - e. Strengthen collaboration with other regional organizations such as the Metropolitan Area Planning Council that work on preserving open space and improving access to it.
2. Clarify who is responsible for creating and maintaining trails, and develop a clearer process for completing that work.
 - a. The Trails Committee has done a good job but is hampered by confusion over who is in charge. Funds for maintaining trails seem to come from various town departments and organizations. Who does the committee report to? Should it work under the Department of Public Works, as they have the budget and labor resources? Would a subcommittee of the Land Acquisition Committee with a mandate to maintain and improve trails work better?
 - b. Does the town need to hire a staff person dedicated to open space? Can the assistant planner focus on this? Does DPW need more resources to accomplish what needs to be done?
 - c. Bedford is very concerned about liability when volunteers work on trails and trees, and restricts most such work. How do other towns harness volunteers?
3. Improve trails already in place.
 - a. For example, maintain the trail from the extension of the bike path to the Marshall’s/Whole Foods shopping center.
 - b. Restore the collapsing bridge across Elm Brook behind Railroad Ave.
4. Develop trails in new areas
 - a. Open up agricultural lands
 - b. Expand the notion of “parks” to include narrow greenways and pocket parks
 - c. Provide better interconnectivity to federal lands.
5. Use limited funds for improving the trail system more effectively.

- a. Prioritize tracts and rights of way that allow interconnectivity among key areas of town.
 - b. Ensure that the land acquisition process is transparent, to preserve public trust. Is the town acquiring a parcel of land for open space or municipal use?
 - c. Reductions in the tax rate on wetlands have made donating them to the town less attractive.
6. Improve communication with residents about Bedford's trail system
- a. Promote the use of trails as transportation among various parts of town as well as recreation.
 - b. Alert residents to the availability of trail maps. Online maps are excellent, but many people do not know about them.
 - c. Link the use of trails with the Board of Health's notion of relying on the physical environment to improve health.
 - d. On the Bedford website, link to the regional biking and trail map created by MAPC.